

[Villa Alexandria]

26055

March 6, 1939.

C. D. Rinehart[,?]

Lawyer.

[1616?] Lynch Bldg.,

Jacksonville,

Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer.

VILLA ALEXANDRIA.

Mr. Rinehart was president of the corporation which bought the Villa Alexandria property in 1925 and placed it on the market for subdivision and sale.

Mr. Rinehart says: "The original Alexander Mitchell purchase consisted of one hundred and forty acres, and was a part of the original Graig Spanish Grant.

"When I and three associates secured the trust in [1925?], the Villa Alexandria residence and other buildings were in a state of disrepair. The property had been vacant for some time, had been partially wrecked by vandals, and in 1927, to prevent further depredations, our company, the Villa Alexandria Corporation, had all buildings completely demolished and the lumber and other materials removed from the premises.

Library of Congress

"The property still lacked purchasers, and during that year, 1927, it was turned over to the Telfair Stockton Company, who subdivided it into a series of waterfront locations. John H. Swisher, the cigar manufacturer, purchased the original homesite[,] [arecting?] thereon his magnificent Spanish type residence. Later his son, Carl Swisher, secured the adjoining lot, and another beautiful home arose. These two purchasers started a demand for homesites in that area and it has subsequently developed into one of the 2 highest class residential sections in the vicinity of Jacksonville.

"In the transaction, however, my associates and I lost a quarter of a million dollars.

"Do I regret it? Step back to the middle office door and look through this window towards South Jacksonville."

I did as he directed, and from this office window on the 15th floor of the Lynch Building, the city on the south side of the St. Johns was revealed like a framed picture. The broad bend in the river, the magnificent bridge connecting Jacksonville with South Jacksonville, the palatial homes lining the western waterfront, the various subdivisions - Granada, Villa Alexandria, Colonial Manor, San Jose - the business section; and to the east the more modest homes of the St. Nicholas section, large passenger and freight boats coming up from the Atlantic, others departing with cargoes for world ports; further on estates like "Keystone[,] " "Tillandsia," and others, with the broad ribbon of Atlantic Boulevard to the [beaches?] separating the two sections.

"No, there are no regrets. Pioneers do not always win financially. Mostly, they pave the way and others reap the financial profits. But as I look through this window, I feel that a score of years ago I had the vision I see manifested today, and I am glad to have had a part in developing the beauty of the south side. We were just a little ahead of the times.

"I do not remember much of the personal history of the Mitchells. Mrs. Mitchell traveled a great deal, and used the Villa as a winter residence. There was some family difficulties,

Library of Congress

so that Jacksonville never knew Alexander Mitchell or his son, 3 A. B. Mitchell. The senior Mitchell was one of the early financiers. One of his activities was the organization of the Chicago, Milwaukee [?] St. Paul Railroad, with headquarters in Milwaukee.

"The son, A. B. Mitchell, was a banker in Milwaukee, also at one time was a U. S. Senator from Wisconsin. He was twice married. David Mitchell, a son by his first marriage, lived with his grandmother, who supervised his education, and otherwise cared for him. He is still a resident of Jacksonville.

"A daughter of A. B. Mitchell's by his second marriage is now a Mrs. Jackson. She lived for many years in the [Canal?] Zone, where she met and married her husband who is an official of the United Fruit Company. They now reside in Boston. She is a half-sister of David Mitchell.

"It is reported that Mrs. Mitchell had an income of around \$200,000 per year, with many servants to carry out her lavish ideas of entertainment. She was very charitable, however, being especially interested in St. Luke's Hospital, which she helped to establish, as well as All Saints' [Episcopal?] Church in South Jacksonville.

"The collapse of the bank in which her son was interested in Milwaukee entailed her property here to a considerable extent, so that in her reduced circumstances she had to let all of her servants go, carrying on with one old colored yard man.

"When we purchased the property in [1925?], it was still much encumbered, and we had a difficult time securing a clear title.

4

"I came to Jacksonville in 1889. It was then a sprawling village. The most populous residence section was between Pine Street (now Main) and Liberty street on the [east?]; and from [Duval?] to Bay, in the same boundaries.

Library of Congress

"These streets were all sand - there were no paved streets. In the early 1890's, Bay Street was paved with cypress blocks and it was considered a very fine improvement, but proved quite disappointing, as whenever it rained the water formed pools and the paving blocks would rise and float around in [great?] style. Finally late one summer there [wasterrific?] rainfall over a period of days and the Bay Street paving blocks washed off into the St. Johns River.

"Later Main Street, or Pine Street, as it was known then, was paved with brick out as far as Eighth Street. The old streetcar system used to run out that far. There was a row of [palmettoes?] planted on each side, and the drivers of the [surroys?] which were used to carry the tourists of that day about town told them - "Those palmettoes were planted in that fashion by the Indians to mark an old trail."

"The S. B. Hubbard home was on the corner of Bay and Liberty Streets, and these same drivers, in passing this home would say: "That's where Old Mother Hubbard lives."

"In the late 1880's there were only four families who had carriages and teams worthy of note. One of these was owned by S. B. Hubbard, the founder of the Hubbard Hardware Co. The carriage was the best of the kind for that period, the horses were matched [bays?], and the harness metal was silver-plated. It 5 was an elaborate turnout and attracted much attention, when the family, a colored man in the driver's seat, used to 'ride out.'

"Contrast that period with the present time, where there are 50,000 automobile owners registered in Duval County.

"Bicycling was a popular pastime. I belonged to a club of a dozen or more riders and we used to go out the Main Street route, which was shell-paved from the end of the brick paving at NighthStreet, on over to Talleyrand Avenue and back by the river road through

Library of Congress

Fairfield. It was known as the 'ten-mile-ride' and did measure exactly ten miles for the round trip.

"Yes, I have still confidence in the judgment which made me select Jacksonville for a home as being good for the future, and the immediate prospect is exceedingly bright for the further advancement of Jacksonville and Duval County in particular, Florida in general.

"I am a Democrat and vote my party's ticket. I believe in the [New?] Deal and President Roosevelt, who is earnestly trying to pull the United States out of the rut and better the living conditions for all of her citizens."